

COLOMBIA

A Land of Great
Possibilities★



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It is the purpose of this report to awaken wider interest in the great Republic of Colombia. I say "great" advisedly, as will be seen later on, in my discussion of her area and resources. Not only should the merchants, manufacturers, exporters, and capitalists of the United States, from selfish reasons, turn their eyes to Colombia, but all men, who are students of international affairs, or who care to keep informed on remarkable achievement and possibilities beyond the confines of the United States, should watch Colombian progress. Then there is a particular reason, growing out of the recent Panama unpleasantness, why the government and people of the United States should lend Colombia a helping hand in her efforts to develop a new era of prosperity.

I do not lay any claims to being a prophet, but, simply making a calculation for the future, as reasonable as to say that four will be the sum if you can find two and two to add, I desire to go on record as believing that Colombia will presently experience a material development like that of Mexico, which has astonished the world and attracted the investment of six hundred millions gold of United States money. *In other words, I hold, after having visited nearly all the Latin-American republics from Mexico to Argentina, that Colombia in proportion to area and population is the richest of all in variety and extent of undeveloped resources and opportunities.*

THE TIME TO ACT

It especially behooves the trade, investment, and political interests of the United States to give heed to Colombia's potentialities without further delay, because the corresponding interests of Europe are already aroused to their appreciation and legitimate exploitation. Although Colombia is at our very doors, although it is nearer to the principal ports of the United States than any other South American country, we are almost in the attitude of sitting idly by and listlessly watching the distant nations of Europe develop her internal resources and control her foreign commerce.

How feelingly I write can be realized when I record that only a few days ago (in May, 1906), a great English corporation completely bought out the principal American railway, steamboat, and development company in Colombia,—and this followed the sale by another American company of

one of the best railroad concessions in the country to a European corporation. Such transfers cannot indicate lack of confidence in the future of Colombia, as Europeans study that phase of the situation even more carefully than Americans; they are rather due either to American desire to make immediate profits by selling out, or to lack of familiarity of Americans with the ultimate possibilities of the country.

COLOMBIA'S STRATEGIC LOCATION

I wish first to call attention to a few remarkable geographical facts about Colombia, not generally known, but which should serve to awaken special interest in her as one of our nearest neighbors and one of the most important. Colombia's intimate proximity to the United States is brought out clearly by the following points:—

- (1) The least distance between Colombia and the United States is only 950 miles.
- (2) From Cartagena to Tampa, Florida, is less distance by sea than from New York to St. Louis by land.
- (3) From Cartagena to New Orleans is only 1,400 miles or four days easy steaming.
- (4) From Barranquilla, another Colombian port, to New York is almost a straight line, due north, less than 1,900 miles and five days easy steaming.
- (5) Colombia is nearer than Panama to the majority of Atlantic and Gulf ports of the United States.

Colombia's strategic position in commerce and international relations is demonstrated by the fact that she is *the only South American country bordering on both the Atlantic and Pacific* and therefore having immediate and direct access by the great highway of the sea to the markets of the entire world. The completion of the Panama Canal, will, moreover, strengthen this ideal position. Colombia has nearly 500 miles reach of coast, respectively, on the Atlantic and the Pacific.

HER VAST EXTENT OF AREA

Colombia's area entitles her to rank among the larger countries of the world. Comparisons in this case are not odious, but decidedly interesting. Some that will help to picture her extent are the following:—

- (1) Colombia is larger than Germany, Holland, and Belgium combined.
- (2) Larger than all the coast states of the United States from Maine to Florida

united, with Ohio and West Virginia added.

(3) Larger than Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Kentucky, and Tennessee merged in one State.

(4) As large as California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Nevada together.

These comparisons permit people in different parts of the United States to comprehend readily why I call Colombia "great," and show more plainly her size than if it were simply recorded that her area exceeds 500,000 square miles.

As her population is not more than 4,000,000, with an area and productive capacity to support 40,000,000, it can be seen that she is in the very infancy of her development. In speaking of her population, let me add that the majority of her inhabitants are hard-working and industrious, and, were it not for the many civil wars that have drained their life-blood and exhausted their energies, they would be one of the richest peoples per capita in the world. *It is the fervent prayer of all sincere friends of Colombia that President Reyes may be spared in health and life to succeed in his noble efforts to evolve permanent peace and consequent prosperity for his long-suffering land.*

THE APPROACHES TO COLOMBIA

The foregoing description of Colombia's location and area naturally suggests the question: *How is Colombia now approached from the United States*, or how are her principal ports and interior points reached by trade and travelers? There are two important ports on the Atlantic or Caribbean shore, namely, Barranquilla and Cartagena, which are connected with New York by regular steamship lines running frequently, and with Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, New Orleans and Galveston by occasional steamers. Chief among the former are the Hamburg-American (German) which has absorbed the Atlas Line, and the Royal Mail (English). The Hamburg-American, which is adding new steamers, touches at Kingston, Jamaica, and Port Limon, Costa Rica, en route, and the Royal Mail, which has recently entered the field of communication with New York, at Colon (Panama) and Kingston. There is also a line of fast steamers belonging to the United Fruit Company and running regularly and often between Santa Marta, near Barranquilla, and New York or New Orleans. There are, therefore, fair

facilities for the exchange of trade and travel between Colombia and the United States, but these would be greatly improved if business demanded.

Europe is even better off in its steamship communication with Colombia, except for the heavy handicap of distance and time, as there are numerous large freight and passenger vessels plying regularly between the above-mentioned ports and those of England, Germany, France, Spain, and Italy.

On the Pacific side the only port of importance is Buenaventura, which is connected with Panama by regular weekly steamers and smaller coasting vessels. It is not yet a large town, but it is destined to be a city of considerable size when the Panama Canal is opened, and when the new railroad, now being constructed by two enterprising Americans, Messrs. Alfred Bishop and Edward H. Mason, is completed to Bogota, the capital. It is the gateway to the marvelously rich state of Cauca, which, with an extent equal to that of California, is described by the best authorities as one of the "garden spots" of the world. Shipments and travel to Buenaventura, Cali, Palmira, Popayan, in the Cauca, from either San Francisco or New York, go now via Panama.

Referring again to the Atlantic coast, it is to be noted that the principal interior points, like Medellin, Manizales, Bucaramanga, and Bogota, excepting those in the Cauca just mentioned, and some points now accessible through Lake Maracaibo, near Venezuela, like Cucuta, are reached through Cartagena and Barranquilla and thence by extensive river and overland routes. Colombia is greatly favored with navigable rivers. By means of the mighty Magdalena flowing due north through the heart of Colombia from Ecuador to the Atlantic, and by its tributaries, over half her area has a natural outlet and inlet to and from the sea.

HER REMARKABLE CLIMATE

Perhaps the chief marvel of Colombia is her variety of climate. The average foreigner pictures Colombia as hot as "Tophet" and steaming like the jungles of Kipling's tales. He looks on the map and this view is confirmed. But what a mistake! Although all of Colombia is geographically in the tropics and its southwestern point is only a few miles from the equator, it has sections as large as New England where the climate is as cool and refreshing the year round as that of

Vermont in May and September, and where all the products of the temperate zone grow even better than they do in Maine and Minnesota. It is not merely location on the map but altitude above the sea that determines temperature.

When the generous Creator made Colombia He remembered this fact and counterbalanced her equatorial proximity by upheaving vast plateaus in the Andes to such a height that they possess an ideal climate. But He did not spoil His work by monotonous similarity; on the contrary He interwove with these lofty plains beautiful warm valleys where grow in glorious abundance all the products of the rich tropics. The average resident of Colombia can have upon his table any day the best food of both zones, raised in his immediate neighborhood.

MINGLING OF PLATEAUS AND VALLEYS

Three magnificent branches of the Andean Cordillera extend right through Colombia and provide her with a mingling of tropical valleys and temperate plateaus unequalled in any other part of the world. There are scores of places in Colombia where one can lie in a hammock under a palm tree eating bananas, and yet gaze almost straight up and behold in plain view the everlasting snows of neighboring mountain peaks. In as many other places I have sat wrapped in an overcoat upon the verandah of an Hacienda in the "high country," and looked far down into valleys where the only covering of the children playing about was that which God had given them. All this suggests the pertinent inquiry: *How can a country fail to be immeasurably rich which has these characteristics?* I enlarge upon them, as only in that way can I arouse the real interest of the average man who reads diplomatic and consular reports.

BOGOTA: COLOMBIA'S UNIQUE CAPITAL

Let us consider Bogota, the interesting, cultured, and influential capital of Colombia. Here is a city of 120,000 people, only 250 miles from the equator, which glories in a climate, never as cold as that of Atlanta, Georgia, never as hot as that of Montreal, in Canada, and bracing—but never chilling—the entire year, and which would become one of the world's most popular health resorts if it were easily accessible. But that is not all—it is beautifully located on a level plain or savannah, 8,500 feet above the sea, that winds in and out through the surrounding mountains for nearly 100 miles in length and varies in width

from forty to five miles. That this fair plain was once the bed of a great inland sea there can be no doubt. Its soil is marvelously rich, and upon it are raised cattle, horses, mules, pigs and goats, as well as wheat, corn, barley, alfalfa, potatoes, and all kinds of vegetables, which would please the most critical farmers of Illinois and Nebraska.

On the other hand, take the railroad train from Bogota to the edge of the plateau, mount a mule and descend the mountains for a two hours' ride, and you will be in the midst of great coffee haciendas, sugar and banana plantations, and all the luxuriance of the real tropics.

PRODUCTS OF COLOMBIAN SOIL.

The logical sequence of this discussion is a summary of the various Colombian products of the soil. In the so-called "hot country" we find coffee, cocoa, sugar, tobacco, indigo, cacao, bananas, vanilla, corn, rice, beans, yucca, oranges, lemons, pineapples, alligator pears, and other tropical fruits growing in splendid abundance. Then in the forests are cedar and mahogany, dye woods, vegetable ivory, Peruvian bark, rubber trees, sarsaparilla, cocoa, ipecacuanha, gums, resins and rare orchids. Cotton will grow readily in the open, but so far it is little cultivated, while on the warm uplands are the cinchona, wax palms, balsam of tolu, vine of the cross, and the arisa in the forest, and corn, barley, wheat, potatoes, etc., in the plantations.

To describe further the products of the cooler plateaus of Colombia would simply be to name those of Northern United States and Europe, but the oddity and advantage of it all to Colombia is that the hot and cold zones are in such remarkable and accessible proximity. We do not think of Colombia as a cattle country, but I have seen as fine beef on the hoof in both the hot and cold sections of the republic as can be raised on our western plains. *The day is not remote when Colombia will be supplying the New York market with meat*; and it should supply the present and future demands of the Panama Canal zone not only with beef but with all other kinds of fresh natural products.

HER WEALTH OF MINERALS

Now let us turn to the ever-fascinating subject of minerals and mines. Colombia would be a rich country if dependent only on its agricultural and

forest wealth, but it has a vast supply of minerals and precious stones that only would make it a land of immense riches. *If coal ever gives out in the United States there is enough in Colombia to supply the world for centuries.* It is found in many different parts of the republic, including the neighborhood of Cali in the Cauca on the Pacific and also near the Atlantic coast; while there is so much soft or bituminous coal in the mountains around Bogota that the numerous mines, running into their sides here and there, remind one of giant gopher holes.

There are also indications of anthracite deposits which may rival those of Pennsylvania. So far these have not been developed because the natives do not understand or like hard coal.

Gold is mined in the states of Antioquia, Caldas, Tolima, and Santander in richly paying quantities, *and experts declare that some day there will be a "boom" here* like those of the Klondike, California, and South Africa. Silver is found in Antioquia, Cauca, and Tolima; copper in Boyaca; platinum in Cauca; petroleum in Tolima; while lime, alum, chalk, magnesia, sulphur, marble, asphalt, cinnabar, lead, quicksilver ore are found in large deposits in many parts of the country.

At Pradera, not far from Bogota, iron and coal are side by side in such vast amounts that costly iron works have been erected and it is now proposed to undertake the manufacture of steel by the Bessemer process.

A GREAT DEVELOPMENT AHEAD

While I am not an expert or authority on mines or minerals, I have seen enough of them, especially in the United States and in Mexico, to be convinced from my investigations in Colombia that when this republic is once opened up with railroads *she will experience a mining exploitation and development equal to that of Mexico or our West.* I expect and hope to see millions of American money presently invested on a paying basis in Colombia, not only in mines but in railroads, industries, agriculture, and commerce. It is an inviting field, and the more one studies it, the more he is convinced of its great potentialities. Of course there are prospectors upon prospectors who visit Colombia and return to the United States condemning and denying her resources, but other countries, like Mexico, have had similar experiences and yet turned out immensely rich.

The United States is Colombia's best market. Not only now does the United States buy more Colombian products than any other foreign nation, but, as time goes on, Colombia is sure to depend more and more on the demands of American consumption. At the same time the United States is able to supply four-fifths of what Colombia now buys abroad and should in time control by far the major portion of her imports. Thus, both the United States and Colombia, having vital and mutual interests at stake, should certainly study their commercial and political relations in the sincere hope of permanently bettering them. I reflect in no way on the efforts of Great Britain, Germany, France, Italy, and Spain to advance their material and trade interests in Colombia; per contra, I admire the efforts which their representatives and subjects are making to add to their commerce and prestige in Colombia. *There is abundant room and abundant business for all without unpleasant rivalry, while the more these diverse national interests work in harmony, the more good they can do not only to themselves but to Colombia and Colombians also.*

It is, however, humiliating to see Europeans, having actually less at stake than Americans, investing in the country or locating here, in the place of Americans of faint heart and temporary stay. There are some gratifying exceptions to this rule, and such Americans are not only liked by the people but they are sure to reap in time a worthy reward for their confidences in the country and their perseverance in developing its manifold resources. They are wise in their generation where the majority are foolish.

WHAT COLOMBIA BUYS AND SELLS

Today Colombia is selling to the United States such exports as coffee, hides, alligator and goat skins, gold bars and dust, rubber, tobacco and balsam of tolu, heron plumes and other feathers, straw hats, bananas, cocoanuts, chocolate, ivory nuts, quina, platinum, dye woods, cedar and mahogany, orchids, etc. The value of these exports to the United States in 1905 approximated \$6,300,000 gold. This amount will be tripled when Colombia is started on an era of permanent peace, and the national productiveness is accordingly increased.

Colombian imports from the United States include flour, kerosene oil, agricultural implements,

mining and sugar refining machinery, railroad and steamboat equipment, novelties of all kinds, shoes, matches, arms, sporting goods, hardware, dyes and chemicals, toilet articles, some lines of cotton cloth and clothing, paper and printing supplies, etc.; but, excepting the first of these items, the greatest quantities are supplied by Europe. Imports from the United States in 1905 amounted in value only to \$3,700,000, although the grand total of foreign imports amounted approximately from \$12,000,000 to \$15,000,000.

ADVERSE CONDITIONS OF TRADE

If I were to make any special comment upon conditions which act as a hardship on foreign imports, I would call attention, with all due respect to the Colombian government and the reasons it may have for its policies, first, to the exceptionally high fees charged by Colombian consulates for certifying to invoices, and, second, to the frequent changes that are made in the Colombian tariff schedule without due notice to exporters and importers. The sooner the government lowers the former to reasonable figures and makes the latter more stable, the sooner will it foster foreign trade and increase its own revenue. Chambers of Commerce of the United States, England, and France, have complained to their respective foreign offices, and they have in turn instructed their different diplomatic officers at Bogota to make earnest representations on these points, but the handicap still exists. It is to be hoped that President Reyes, with characteristic good judgment, will soon order the new and necessary changes and improvements.

PACKING AND TRANSPORTATION

While discussing commercial embargos, I wish to remind American exporters that the necessity of strong, careful, and special packing is more apparent in Colombia than in almost any other country. Two peculiar features of the situation must always be borne in mind: first, the tropical atmosphere at all ports of entry and in the lower section; second, the mule-back transportation overland from the rivers to the cities and towns of the higher interior. The dampness and heat of the former will ruin delicate and other shipments not incased in tin or other suitable air and water-tight covering, while the limited carrying facilities of the latter require that packages shall not exceed 125 pounds in weight. These rules

apply to the great average run of imports. Of course there is a special provision for heavy machinery, but its transportation is always expensive, dangerous, and slow. The completion of the new railroads, now being laid down, should solve the problems of weight, but it cannot provide against the dampness and heat.

COLOMBIA SHOULD INTEREST ALL CLASSES

As I wish to interest not only business men but those of other callings and pursuits, permit me to say a passing word about two or three widely diverse features of my subject. The student of literature, politics, history, social and educational development can find much to attract his thought and attention in Colombia. Ever since Christopher Columbus discovered Cape Gracias á Dios, Colombia has been the scene of important and stirring events. The sway of Spain lasted nearly three centuries and the history thereof is full of romance and excitement. From the independence of the republic in 1810 until now, Colombia has been recognized as one of the forceful nations of South America, and she has provided her quota of men eminent in the economic, political, social, and literary life of the Southern Continent. The national library of 40,000 volumes in Bogota holds abundant evidence of the valuable work of her statesmen, generals, scholars, poets, historical and romantic writers, scientists, and geographers.

A FIELD FOR THE SPORTSMAN AND SCIENTIST

On the other hand, the true American who loves sportsmanship and hunting for the exercise and rest, or the professional explorer and hunter who seeks new fields and prey, will find in Colombia unrivalled opportunities for pleasure or adventure. In the tropical and semi-tropical forests roam the jaguar, puma, bear, amarillo, tapir, pecary, sloth, deer, opossum, and cary. In the trees can be seen monkeys and a multitude of bird species like condors, parrots, cockatoos, toucans, bush turkeys or grouse, and humming-birds. In the rivers are legions of alligators and iguanas, while along the coast are turtles in abundance. Cranes and storks fly over the damp lowlands and boa constrictors crawl through the rank vegetation. In the higher and colder country are deer, foxes, mountain lions, and tigers, and along the lagoons and among the fields duck, snipe, and pigeons.

The geologist, mineralogist, botanist, forester,

and average scientist, moreover, can always find abundant lines of study and investigation, respectively, in the geological formation, mineral deposits, flora and tree growth, and general physical characteristics of Colombia. In this connection it must be remembered that the great Humboldt found this part of South America the most interesting of his travels. The National Museum in Bogota contains rare specimens of fauna, flora, mineral and geological development, which interest both the layman and the specialist.

THE FEELING TOWARDS AMERICANS

The question is continually being asked me: *What is the attitude of the Colombian government and people towards Americans and American interests on account of the Panama affair?* Without entering upon any political discussion, I wish, in answering this pertinent inquiry, to take advantage of the opportunity to pay a just and frank tribute to Colombia. Speaking in the first place for myself as Minister, I can truthfully say that ever since my arrival here eight months ago, I have been treated with a generous kindness and sincere hospitality which has made a deep impression on me and increased my respect for Colombians in particular and Latin-Americans in general. The United States Minister has been extended invitations official and personal, and the United States Legation, in turn, has been continually frequented by leading men of all parties, as if nothing had ever happened to mar the *entente cordiale* of the two countries.

In the granting of concessions and in the hearing of claims the government has treated Americans with as much consideration as Europeans. During my stay here, and up to this time, there has not been one complaint lodged in this Legation by Americans of unkind treatment by Colombians due to any political or anti-American feeling. In my own travels in various parts of the country, officials and peons alike have everywhere accorded me polite and even gracious attention. To let it be known that I was United States Minister has always brought extra courtesies rather than any lack of them.

THE FUTURE FULL OF HOPE

I would not, however, have it understood abroad that there is not still strong feeling against the United States. It does exist, but the passage of years, and generous, fair treatment of Colombia

and Colombians by the United States and its citizens, in international relations and friendly social and commercial intercourse, will accomplish its gradual disappearance. Such feeling does not take the attitude of personal enmity towards Americans. The Colombians, high and low, are too polite and sensible for that. It is a feeling, in the minds and hearts based on high political and patriotic grounds, which, however, with commendable philosophy, recognizes the inevitable, and now turns to the future to bring blessings that will counterbalance the losses and sorrows of the past.

The very courage and nobility of this attitude of Colombia are one of the chief reasons why I predict for her a magnificent future. Already this policy—if I may call it policy—is bearing fruit in the development of a greater, more friendly and sympathetic interest throughout the United States in Colombia, *which is destined to lead to a mutually favorable understanding and settlement of all differences in the near future in the form of new treaties of peace, friendship, and commerce.*

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Before concluding this report one or two points should be touched upon. *Great credit is due General Rafael Reyes, President of this Republic, for his untiring efforts to restore the prosperity of his country to the position it occupied before the last civil war and the loss of Panama.* If he succeeds, he will deserve a place in history like that of President Diaz in Mexico. He has so far effectually stopped revolutions, and, if his life and health are spared, Colombia would seem to be assured of peace at least during his administration.

A word of credit should also be given the press of the country for its efforts to promote the welfare of the nation. Such newspapers as *El Correo Nacional* and *El Nuevo Tiempo* in Bogota, *El Porvenir* in Cartagena, *El Conservador* and *Rigolletto* in Barranquilla. *La Patria* in Medellin, *El Correo del Cauca* in Cali, and *El Trabajo* in Cucuta, are enterprising, public-spirited, and well educated. They are especially to be commended for their fair treatment of the United States and of Americans residing in Bogota, and Colombia.

For the benefit of those desiring further detailed information about Colombia, I would refer them to the International Bureau of American

Republics in Washington and to the excellent reports of the United States Consul-General at Bogota and of the Consuls at Cartagena and Barranquilla, published in the "Commercial Relations of the United States" and the "Daily Consular and Trade Reports" issued by the Bureau of Manufactures, of the Department of Commerce and Labor. Any questions addressed to me care of the Department of State, Washington, D. C., will also be courteously and promptly answered to the best of my ability.

United States Legation,
Bogota, Colombia, June 7, 1906.





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